

the price of heating oil went up because of the demand for natural gas. It struck a blow to many of the businesses in our State, let alone those people who I talked about before who live in our inner cities and who do not have the kind of furnaces we have, the windows, and all of the other items that are available to those who are a little bit more fortunate.

I am urging my colleagues in the Senate to arrange to work out some agreement where we can bring this energy issue to the floor and debate it. I am sure there are going to be controversial issues, but we have dealt with controversial issues before. Let's get it on the floor. Let's amend it. Let's debate it and get it over with so we can secure our economic future, secure our competitive position in the global marketplace, and, last but not least, secure our national security.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CORZINE). The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, first I rise to compliment my colleague, the Senator from Ohio, on his presentation. I think it was a very useful one. I personally enjoyed it and learned from it. I thank my colleague for the effort that went into that presentation on our energy needs in this country. I thought he did an excellent job of presentation.

FARM POLICY

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about farm policy. We have just now heard that the administration has endorsed Senator LUGAR's farm plan, which fundamentally, in my judgment, abandons family farms and the rural economy.

The farm plan that the administration is now supportive of is radical and it is ruinous. I don't know how to sugarcoat it. This is an absolute unmitigated disaster for the rural parts of the country.

The President is, in essence, backing a plan that eliminates farm programs—this at a time that our major competitors, the Europeans, are outspending us 10 to 1 in support for farm producers, and in terms of export support they are outdoing us 30 to 1.

It is no wonder that these are hard times in farm country. It is no wonder that when I go home to North Dakota—one of the most agricultural States in the Nation—farm producers tell me they wonder why they should stay in agriculture when there is virtually no financial return. There is enormous risk.

The plan the President has endorsed is an absolute abdication. It says we are going to eliminate AMTA payments immediately. It says we are going to eliminate in just a few years the marketing loan program. It says we are going to eliminate the sugar program, the dairy program, and the

peanut program. For all of that, it substitutes a voucher system that is woefully inadequate, and which will leave tens of thousands of farmers in a position of financial failure.

That is the plan this President has endorsed. That is the plan the President would impose on farm producers across this country.

I cannot say strongly enough what an absolute economic disaster that plan would be for virtually every farm State in the Nation.

What the President is calling for is abandoning of farmers in every part of America. What the President is saying is he doesn't like the previous farm policy. Very few of us do. His answer is a farm policy that signals retreat. His policy would say to our European adversaries and competitors: You take the agricultural markets. You become the dominant producer in the world.

That is a profoundly wrong policy for this country. I am certain the Europeans are taking great comfort today in the announcement by the White House that they back a policy which is a policy of unilateral surrender. I do not know how else to term it.

If this policy were ever to become the law, you would see mass bankruptcy all across the rural parts of this country.

One of the farm group leaders in my State was in my office. I described for him the plan that the administration had endorsed. He thought I was joking. He thought I was putting him on. He could not believe that this would be a farm policy endorsed by this or any administration. In fact, when I asked a group of farm leaders what would happen if we saw the kind of cuts that the President's plan would impose, he said it would mean the race to the auctioneer.

This is a serious matter. The irony is that at the very time this administration is arguing for a stimulus package for the economy, they are proposing a package for agriculture that is the opposite of a stimulus package. It is a package that would destroy many of the farm producers all across this country.

My State is perhaps the most agricultural State in the Nation. This farm policy now endorsed by the Bush administration would be a devastating blow to North Dakota.

A few months ago, the President came to North Dakota and said his administration would be farmer friendly. Now we see a complete abdication on that commitment. Now we see a total reversal with the President proposing a plan that would be an absolute calamity—an economic calamity—not only for North Dakota but for South Dakota, for Nebraska, for Minnesota, for Montana, for Iowa, and for every other farm State in this Nation.

This cannot be.

I hope over the weekend people will reflect on what has happened. I hope all across this country farm group leaders and farm producers will call

the White House, call their representatives, and call their Governors and urge them to tell the White House they have to reverse course. We cannot abandon rural America at a time when the rest of the national economy is already in trouble. We cannot say to America that we are going to provide stimulus to help the economy recover in the urban parts of the country but we are going to abandon the rural parts of our Nation. That cannot be, and it will not be.

I am saying to my colleagues that no stimulus package is going to pass here unless all of America is included—unless the rural parts of this country and the urban parts of the country are treated with respect.

This proposal and this plan is an absolute unmitigated disaster for farm families.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. CONRAD. I am happy to yield.

Mr. REID. I asked a number of Senators from farm States today—I read an article in the newspaper. We are not a farm State. We grow alfalfa. Agriculture is a very minor part of Nevada's economic base.

I asked a number of people about this article in the newspaper. Some had not read it yet. I hope the Senator from North Dakota will continue speaking out on this issue because there are not many farm States remaining. We need some leadership because of what we read in the newspaper, which spins pretty well, that they are going to stop all these things that appear bad for farmers.

I have followed the lead of the Senators from the Dakotas and Iowa in what I think is good farm policy because I know it is the lifeblood of the State of North Dakota.

I hope you continue to speak out, just as you have. We need to hear that in the non-farm States. So I ask the Senator a question. I hope you will speak out on this more than just today. Will you?

Mr. CONRAD. You can count on that.

I say to my friend from the State of Nevada how much we appreciate the assistance he has provided on key farm issues over the years. This is a real jolt to the people I represent because agriculture is the dominant part of our economy. I think people in our State recognize very well the devastation a bill such as this would mean. And I tell you, these are hard times already in our State. Just as we have suffered an economic downturn in this country, we have been facing hard times in agriculture the last 4 years.

In fact, the Senator well remembers we have had to write four economic disaster bills for agriculture in the last 4 years. Every year we have had to write an economic disaster rescue package for our farmers. Without it, tens of thousands of farm families would have been forced off the land. That is the hard reality.

Now this administration endorses a plan that would prevent us from having